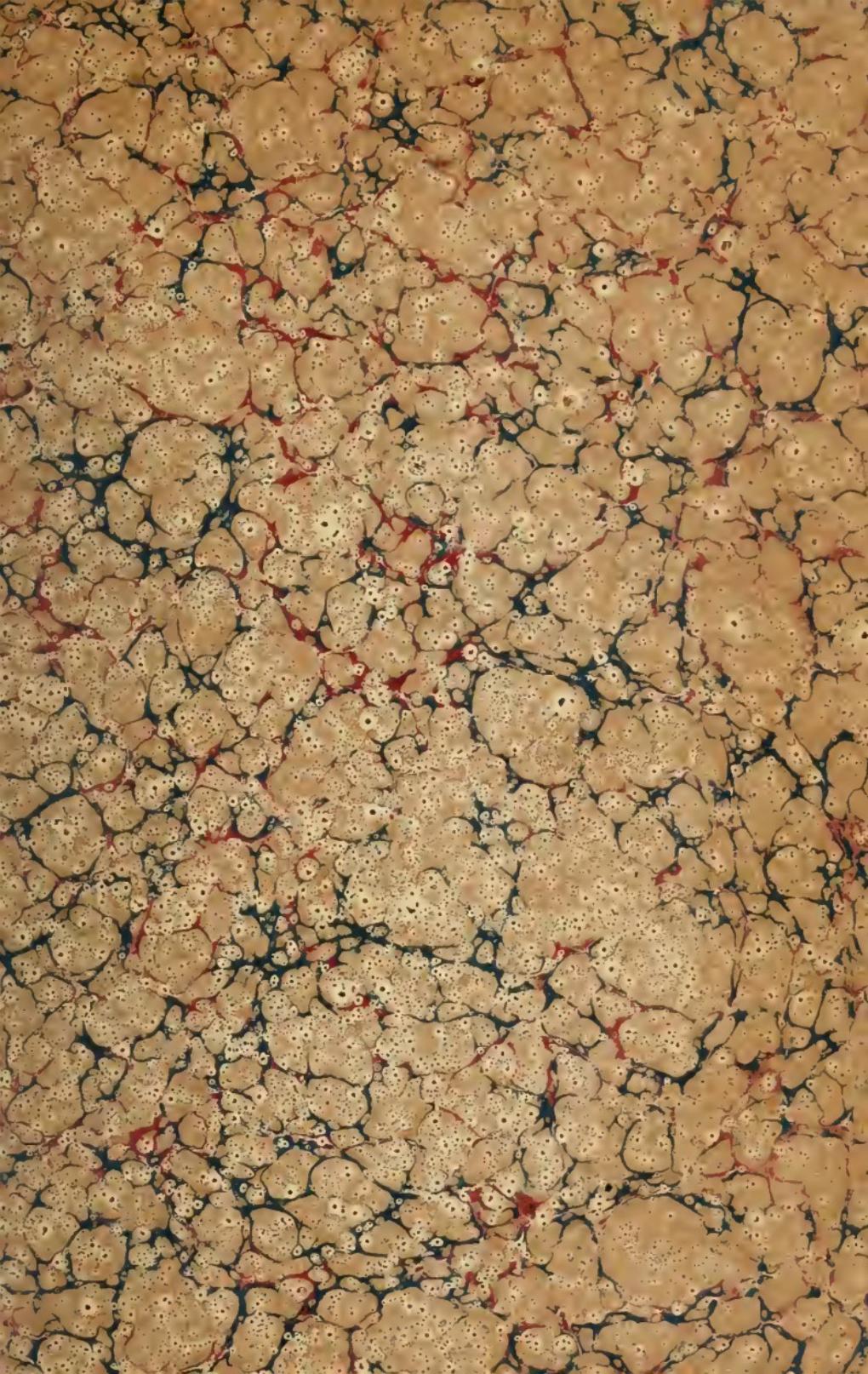


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CITHERN



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By

Emilia Aylmer Blake

(MRS AYLMER COWING)

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POEMS FOR RECITATION

ETC.

BY
EMILIA AYLMER BLAKE
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LONDON
JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL
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THE CITHERN.

THE JUBILEE YEAR,

JUNE 20TH, 1886.

TO THE QUEEN.

LADY, our Queen ! To thee our eyes' desire
Cleaves in sweet homage next to Him alone,
The shadow of whose chariot wheels of fire
Falls on thy earthly throne ;

For thou, dear Sovereign, from thy tender youth,
For fifty years hast held thy glorious reign
In right and mercy—tempered, of a truth,
With touch of human pain.

Yes, thou who dwell'st on that lone seat apart,
Earth's highest—wear'st the veil of mortal woe
Beneath thy diadem, and grief's deep heart,
Like one of us, dost know.

Others have compassed empire by the sword,
And, throned above a sea of fire and blood,
Have taught the trampled earth to know her lord
 And conqueror, unwithstood ;

But thou with tears hast more prevailed than these,
Great mother of the world's imperial race !
Whose millions teem like children round thy knees,
 Gathered to seek thy face.

For all thy loss--for wedlock's holy kiss,
For perfect love, fair virtue's richest dower,
The Father of us all has given thee this
 Most blessed Sovereign power,

To heal and bind the nations, one by one,
To draw the borders of the South and West
Unto the morning land, in union
 Gathered to England's breast.

The golden circlet shines about thy head,
A link of love to join them from afar,
Who dwell in freedom's light and safety, shed
 Down from thy Empire's star.

So, rings of growth upon the British oak
Have marked thy prosperous years of sovereign sway,
And children's children, England's line unbroke,
 Arise and bless thy day :

The promise of a stem of Royal kings,
Mirrored in hope's illimitable sea,
To flourish through the change of earthly things,
Champions of liberty !

Through them, thy thoughts shall live and perish not—
His, too, untimely gone to his reward,
Who shaped thy course with wisdom unforgot,
Thy heart's true wedded lord.

Together at the gates of Paradise
Ye dwelt, till love became sublime by faith,
And light was given to the weeping eyes
To pierce the veil of death.

Long be thy days of earthly blessing yet,
Empress, till God in glory shall restore
Thine own, and on thy brow of sorrow set
Joy's crown for evermore !

ALICE AYRES.

*The Story of a Fire which occurred in the Borough, April 24th,
1885.*

WHAT'S there beneath, where the flowers in a heap
Rain down like the snows of May,
That a fellow like me should turn and weep
As I linger to go away ?

My heart is that full I scarce can speak—
And, mates, ye may well look strange
At the hard, rough man with tears on his cheek—
Yes, faith, I have suffered a change.

What has happened ? Well, one dark night
Last week, I was roaming about
Through London streets, when a sudden light
Woke me up with a start and a shout :

Fire, fire ! ere I knew the words I had said,
They were echoed deep and loud,
With a cry of terror to raise the dead
From the lips of the gathering crowd.

Round a blazing oil-shop they hustle quick,
Like flies where the flames shoot tall,
And the choking smoke burst dark and thick
Through the chinks of the cracking wall.

In the burning frame of a window above
Was set a woman's form,
And a cry, "Help, help, for God's dear love!"
Rang out above the storm.

Quick, quick, to the rescue, firemen brave
With shouts and galloping feet!
"They come, they come, but too late to save,"
The cry rose up from the street.

Each man his coat, each woman her shawl,
They stripped themselves, and bound
In a mass together to break the fall
From topmost floor to ground.

"Leap, leap," they cried, to the ashen face
Hemmed round with darts of flame:
But she vanished three times from that fearful place,
And three times back she came.

Down through the window, a broad, soft bed
She flung on the cruel stones,
Then calmly bore forth in her arms and led
Three helpless little ones.

One by one on the bed beneath
She dropped the children down,
Three lives redeemed from fiery death,
While she thought not of her own.

When we saw her totter through blinding smoke
As her strength with her breath should fail,
From a sea of flamelit faces broke
One agonising wail :

“ For God’s sake, save yourself,” they shriek,
As they raise the outstretched bed ;
Towards the tongues of fire that licked her cheek
The girl turned round her head.

Oh God ! those eyes of anguish wild,
Those white lips of despair
Cast back on the mother and youngest child
Sunk, choked and senseless there !

She could no more—in her frenzy wrought
To a rash and sudden spring—
Headforemost, in our arms we caught
A crushed and speechless thing !

With shouts through the night speed the firemen brave,
As the fountains of flame shoot higher :
A rush of waters—too late to save
From the grasp of the fiend of fire !

Dust and ashes were all that was left
When they passed that smouldering door ;
None lived of that house but those infants bereft,
And she who spoke no more.

I have looked on many an awful sight
On land and aboard o' ships,
But none like that—lying still and white,
With a smile upon her lips.

We lifted her gently one and all—
No sound of life, no stir,
While we bore her to the hospital,
Gave hope to our hearts for her.

I hung like a ghost about the place
Where silent in peace she lay,
With the happy smile on her fair young face,
Till they knew she had passed away.

From her village home we carried her forth
For a noble burial ;
Ay, a hero's grave the maiden were worth
Who died at duty's call.

No soldier nor sailor by land or sea
In the bed of honour laid,
Was ever more great of heart than she,
That simple serving maid.

Ay, all she had she gave—her life,
For the babes she never bore ;
What could the mother and the wife
For flesh of her flesh do more ?

Like a comrade fallen, the firemen brave
Her snow-wreathed coffin bear,
And twenty maidens surround her grave,
In raiment white and fair.

I can well believe by the power of God
A heavenly angel sprung
From that broken lily beneath the sod,
When earth to earth we flung.

This deed she has done shall be hallowed yet
By a people's tears and prayers,
For England our mother can never forget
Such a daughter as Alice Ayres.

THE
GOOD LORD SHAFTESBURY.

(*October, 1885.*)

HE has passed, our knight of the stainless shield,
Through the shadow of the door,
To the wondrous glory, unrevealed
Till time shall be no more.

The noble and mighty is laid to rest,
Who was girt about his knee
With honour's symbol, and bore on his breast
The star of chivalry.

Nor ever of Britain's heroic breed
Went forth to dare and do
A bolder champion, in word and deed,
More stout of heart, more true,

To right the helpless, and lift again
God's children fallen low,
By a hand that thrilled with others' pain
At the touch of want and woe.

In the human outcasts, the abject and base,
By sin and misery trod,
Could his loving eye of compassion trace
The image of his God.

For tender children his soul was vexed,
For their bodies' maim and soil
Through oppression's greed, for women unsexed,
Made vile by shameful toil.

Unto all such as these would he condescend,
Till he led them by the hand
Out of guilt's dishonour, and stood their friend
'Mongst the princes of the land.

And he taught them mercy—the law of love
To every living thing,
For the cry of the speechless is heard above
In the courts of creation's King.

He has lived his life, and, ripe of days,
The garnering angels cull
The golden fruit, and with joy and praise
They have made death beautiful.

His spirit has looked through the eyes of clay
Its last upon his own,
And the quenchless light of another day
In their tender gaze has shone.

God's poor shall hallow his burial
With the tribute of grateful sons ;
By thousands and thousands they follow, all
His hosts of rescued ones.

And the land has hope that bears in her breast
One pure in heart as he,
By her princes and people so honoured, so blest—
The good Lord Shaftesbury.

VICTOR HUGO.

(*June, 1885.*)

WHY sits fair France on her throne of grief
Bowed down 'neath the arrow of fate,
Like a queen bereaved of her prince and chief,
Sore weeping for loss of her mate ?

No iron hand of a warrior king
Yields up to dissolving death
His royal sceptre and marriage ring
With the sigh of departing breath.

'Tis her Victor singer, her voice among men,
Her lord of the eloquent word,
Whose lips lie sealed where never again
The thoughts of his heart may be stirred.

Of a nation's great sorrow the symbols drape
Her monuments of fame ;
And the lights of Paris burn shrouded in crape
With a dim funereal flame.

Weep, mother city, remembering, fond,
Who touched thy ancient stones
With the quenchless spark of a glory beyond
All the sword of conquest owns :

Thy poet son, and thy champion strong
To suffer upon thy part,
Through thy darkest days of reproach and wrong—
The large and pitiful heart.

Ay, for this the most, on the pauper's bier
That carried his corse, as he bade,
Have a mighty people, with many a tear
Their tribute of honour laid.

For this the most, 'neath the glorious arch
Of triumph his body lay,
For a day and a night, till the funeral march
Rolled forth on the Victor's way.

France gave but his due, when she gave him all
The wealth of her homage, nor
Decreed him less noble burial
Than her first great Emperor.

For this the most, the scorner of Rome
As a child of our God, we trust,
May see the light of a Father's home
In the mansions of the just.

No loftier spirit e'er issued forth
God's everlasting door ;
No tenderer bosom e'er cherished on earth
His infants and His poor.

A MISADVENTURE.

Occurred at Little Malton, Sussex, in September, 1884.

NURSLINGS of an English mother,
Up to manhood's pith and bone
Sprung, beside his little brother,
Samuel, her first, her own.

Proud in strength, his six days' labour
Finished, apt for sport and cheer,
At the call of pipe and tabor
Marched the gallant volunteer,

Through the hamlet to the common—
And the mother's eyes would swim
When the lone and weary woman
In the ranks could single him ;

'Mongst those restless, daring spirits,
Taught the uses of command,
And the part each son inherits
In the honour of the land.

Living bulwark, iron steady,
Valour schooled in hours of play
How to wield the weapon ready
For the battle's stern array.

And when work or drill was over
At the close of evening,
With the light laugh of the rover
Would the widow's cottage ring.

Once he came—as 'twere another
Than himself, with voice so strange,
Rude in jest with his young brother
Scared and wondering at the change,

That the frightened boy entreated,
Soothed, and led him towards a chair ;
Searee a quiet moment seated
Could the lad restrain him there.

Up he sprang, and wildly laughing
Snatched his rifle from its place—
In his mood of savage chaffing
Aimed it at his mother's face,

And, within a moment after,
Lay a dying woman there,
And the shouts of drunken laughter
Sank to wailings of despair.

“I am shot,” she moaned ; he heard her—
On his knees, the wretched son
Felt the creeping stain of murder :
“Oh my God, what have I done ?

“Have I killed her ?—poor, poor mother !”
Groaned he o'er her as she lay :
Then he flung aside his brother,
Cried aloud and broke away.

What could late remorse do for her ?
Living voice no more shall rouse
Sleep like that—whose livid horror
Drove him frenzied through the house.

His the hand that quenched for ever
All the love, the hope, the care
That till now had failed him never—
This was more than man could bear.

As the lightning's stroke had killed him
Down he sank—nor moved again—
Yet her spirit's whisper thrilled him :
“Mother-slayer—worse than Cain !”

Long he lay in stillness colder
Than the dead—till Justice came,
And with hand upon his shoulder,
Bade him rise and meet the blame.

And the slayer of his mother
Stood before the coroner,
While, half dead with grief, his brother
Told how all had chanced to her.

Horror rigid, and with creeping
Of the flesh, the red right hand
Pledged the oath, and, broke with weeping,
Words fell echoing through the land ;

And the souls they thrill and harrow
Doubt no more that he speaks true
Of his madness and his sorrow,
Of his love for her he slew.

“ Misadventure,”—so consenting,
Did they let him go his way
Through the years, where no repenting
Can undo that yesterday.

Drink, the woful spring of evil—
Death and hell have bred no worse—
Drink, the smooth and creeping devil
Lured him ’neath the murderer’s curse.

A CHRISTMAS BALLAD.

HAIL, Birthday of the Prince of Peace,
Season most deeply blest ;
When want and woe may feast and sing,
And weary labour rest !

Now, from the hammer and the spade,
The desk, the mart, are come
All they who earn the hard-got bread
For loving ones at home.

No earthly master's busy call
May summon them away ;
The husband and the father sits
Among his own, this day.

Strong cords of love in innocence
Shall bind around the hearth
Soul unto soul, while face on face
Sheds light of hallowed mirth.

The merry children's dancing feet,
About the Christmas tree,
Ring through the house from floor to roof
With shouts of frolic glee.

And friends have met, from near, from far—
From o'er the Western main
The heir of broader fields than ours
With joy is come again !

He tells of hope 'neath brighter suns,
Where honest toil makes sure
To win the riches of the earth,
Where no man need be poor.

The wondering young ones gathered round,
With greedy ears and eyes
Hang on his words, and loud exclaim
At every new surprise.

The mother's heart is full—her boy,
Her eldest hope and pride,
Is come with blessing to the nest,
This happy Christmas tide !

The father tastes in joy secure
The peace of his abode,
For all their days have he and his
In soberness served God.

A PLEA FOR MERCY.

Who shall plead the cause of mercy
To the speechless things of life,
Sharers of our day of nature
Where the seeds of death are rife ?

Who that thrills with tender pity,
Kind to all, embraces not
In the common bond of feeling
Those whom God has not forgot ?

Not in vain to Him the ravens'
And the lions' younglings call ;
Not without their great Creator
May the unnoted sparrows fall.

When our father Adam named them
And received them to his use,
He was made their lord, to spare them
From oppression's vile abuse.

In one ark upon the waters
 Floated every rescued race,
Till the dove on silver pinion
 Found for man a resting-place.

To the children of the Highest
 Cometh down the Holy Dove,
From the clouds of heaven opening
 O'er His own in power and love,

That their hearts may burn to seek Him
 And to know Him as He is,
Tender unto every creature,
 Offspring all alike of His.

A

TERRIBLE TALE OF THE SEA.

WE were but poor and common men, a shipwrecked crew
of three,

Yet the world stood still when we came to tell our
Terrible Tale of the Sea ;

Murder they called it—what we did—O God ! and if it
were,

The pangs that tempted us were more than living flesh
could bear.

And I must speak, or my heart would break, the stern
and awful truth,

Though no tongue but mine accuse us men of the blood
of that orphan youth.

Shall we be the last, and were we the first, to sin and
suffer so ?

That the earth cries out to the sea, she has heard no
story of such woe.

A simple and a common tale: our lives for bread were sold,
To plough rough seas in a pleasure toy towards the Southern land of gold.
May weather went with us down stream, as they towed her out to sea,
And we made our course for Madeira isle, as fair as fair could be.

Four weeks were told from the day we shipped, and straight above, at noon,
The sun shot down his fires on our heads from his throne of eternal June :
The wild winds blew, the big seas lashed, and hid our little sail,
But hope stood firm through the tempest's stress, so bravely she rode the gale.

The Captain bade heave-to for the night, and every inch was furled :
Then rose the roar of a mighty wave straight down upon us hurled ;
It passed ; with the grip of death upon life we drowning four held on,
And the depths of waters heard our cry: "My God, her bulwarks gone."

With sides stove in she was sinking fast : we cut away
a boat,
Flung in our compass—and hoped our lives on the angry
seas might float.
Through God's high will they bore up 'neath the pall of
the sudden dark,
And we beat off Death when he called for his due by the
jaws of the ravening shark.

The light came back and stirred again suspended nature's
power,
And woke us, lone in our hunger-pain, to the horror of
the hour.
Four days had gone—and a turtle gave his flesh to our
hands for meat :
And we shouted for joy 'neath the pleasant sun, and
fought for the life that was sweet.

We were three strong men and a little lad, who moaned
as his eyes grew dim :
“ We shall soon see land,” ah ! too well we knew, but we
said no word to him ;
For we loved the boy, and down in the boat in pain-
racked dreams he lay,
And as long as we might, from his fading sight we hid
our fears away.

When our cry went up for the tempest shower, and we
caught some drops of rain,
On his baking lip, the precious sip we pressed again and
again.
We count the days as we watch the sun : to left of our
course he dips
In the far-off sea, and to west by north, we steer for the
track of the ships.

We stripped our backs for the wherewithal to rig our
boat with a sail,
And we prayed out loud in a horror of dread when the
dying light grew pale :
Oh, God ! those long, long hours of the dark, when
slumber mocked despair
With broken dreams of a feverish feast—yet hunger men
can bear,

Not thirst, not thirst ! not even Thy Son, who died upon
the tree,
Had parched thus long when He cried : “ My God, why
hast Thou forsaken me ? ”
But once we quaffed the bitter draught of the rippling,
scornful wave,
It burned like fire—yet there beneath lay peace in an
ocean grave.

No woman's tremors shook our hearts that we should shrink for fear;
'Twas for love of wife and tender babes the life God gave was dear.
Days grew to weeks, till flesh and strength had fallen clean away:
The sunk eyes gleamed from living forms that rotted in death's decay.

We looked each other in the face as in a hideous glass,
Where Cain's curs'd spirit bade each man behold the thing he was.
I cannot tell of how it fell, for horror and for shame—
How men go mad like famished beasts—and to that pass we came.

I'd rend in twain this throbbing brain to forget it, if I could!
How we looked upon the dying boy and thirsted for his blood.
He had drunk by night of the false, salt sea, whose poison burned in his veins;
And a helpless groaning heap he lay on the rack of his fever pains.

We heard him cry, "We all shall die"—and the Captain
muttered, 'Twere best
Draw lots, for 'twas hard that four should go, when one
might save the rest.
"We will die together," cried one and all; and he
answered, "So let it be;"
But he whispered that night: "There are wives and
babes to weep for you and me;

And the boy is dying."—At break of day, no sail to bid
us live:
And the Captain prayed with a wild, hoarse cry: "O
God above, forgive."
We hid our faces, and shrunk away, with horror stricken
dumb:
But we knew he said 'to the orphan lad: "Richard, your
time is come."

"What, me, sir?" "Yes, my son"—we heard, and
knew what thing was done,
And the sounds in our ears, like drops of fire, fell slowly,
one by one.
A moment stopped his innocent breath, he did not cry,
nor strive,
And, as the gushing life-blood streamed—enough—I am
alive.

Ask me no more ! we have spoken truth, and earned the
ban of crime :

The law's slow torture bids us yet once more pass
through that time—

That time of hell !—Can man compel from man such tale
of woe ?

While Mercy, shuddering, veils her face, and weeping,
bids us Go !

FOR
ENGLAND AND THE RIGHT
(*April, 1878.*)

BRITONS, stirred at last to anger
By the boast of tyrant might,
Wake the trumpet's martial clangour,
Cry, "For England and the right!"

Men of Britain, stand united
All at one against the Russ ;
Till the oppressor's wrong be righted,
Till the despot bend to us.

Idly has his fury vaunted
"Hearts of oak" decay in you ;
Still Old England lives undaunted,
Still her mettle's iron-true.

Still a race her soil inherit
Glad to die for duty's sake ;
Still they bear the quenchless spirit
Of her Nelson and her Blake.

Shall we see the Cossack tread on
Right of ours, submitting tame ?
While the hosts of Armageddon
Cover earth with blood and shame ?

Never, till this land of Britain
Sink beneath her guardian sea,
Till her story pause unwritten
At thy death-shriek, Liberty !

Never, till we fall, divided,
From the living truth of God ;
Till a foeman's foot has bided,
Undisturbed, on Albion's sod.

Dare the world to pluck asunder
Freedom's heirs arisen in might ;
Lift a people's voice of thunder,
England ! God defend the right !

VICTORIA VICTRIX.

(*June, 1878.*)

“Why should England seek for allies ?
But let England do the right,
Freedom’s host around her rallies,
Armed with truth and heavenly light.

“Peace, if peace may stand with honour,
Be our prayer and heart’s desire ;
But if Russia bring upon her
War and havoc, sword and fire,

“England will not pause from slaughter
Till her rival, crushed and dumb,
Drink of bitter shame like water,
All resistance overcome.”

Thus an oracle hath spoken
Forth the voice of England’s brave ;
Thus her heroes’ souls have broken
Through the silence of the grave.

Lives Old England's spirit only
In a woman's bosom now,
Though in widowed sorrow lonely
Droops that golden-rounded brow ?

Yet we have a Queen in Britain,
And these words of truth among
England's annals shall be written
In the marble of our tongue.

Lightning-wingèd speeds the answer
From the children of the morn,
'Neath the blood-fierce heat of Cancer
To the battle bred and born.

By the Lion creeps the Tiger,
With the leash about his neck ;
For the battle panting eager,
Lo ! he spurns against the check.

England knows no hand unsteady
East and West could thus unite ;
Ready so, ay, ever ready,
Britons stand upon their right !

FREDERICK GUSTAVUS BURNABY.

WHERE the wellsprings of sweet water
Pierce Bayuda's sandy sea,
Surges up the sound of slaughter
Hushed by shouts of victory !

England strikes a blow for empire
O'er the farthest south and east,
'Gainst the life-devouring vampire,
Slavery's fanatic priest :

'Gainst that false and perjured prophet
We are but a handful, flung
For his dusky hordes to scoff at
With the arrows of the tongue.

Like a locust-cloud dark gathering
Sweeps the countless desert host
O'er the scared earth's bosom, withering
All that breathes or lives, almost :

Halt and form ! our lost twelve hundred
Side to side closed in their square,
While the fierce Arabian wondered
What destruction men may dare.

Down on us, now hid, now springing
Like a fountain from beneath,
On they plunge, with weapons swinging,
Lance from rest and sword from sheath.

Down upon our lost twelve hundred
Through our leaden hail they close,
Pierce, and break our line, outnumbered
Ten to one, by gallant foes.

Saxon pluck, by no disaster
Taught to yield, at handgrips met
Death, and bade him know a master,
Matching spear with bayonet.

Dear the cost ! while backward speeding,
Baffled, spent, the Bedouin flee,
'Neath the stroke of battle bleeding,
Down sinks gallant Burnaby.

Never, bred for Britain's glory,
Grander height or statelier girth,
'Mong her sons of ancient story
Moved a giant on the earth.

Who shall whisper Erin's daughter ?

 Who shall smite her with a word
Sharper than the spear—how slaughter
 Fell upon her soldier-lord ?

Though in joy and pride he won her,
 Though he loved fair Erin's child,
From her side by radiant Honour
 Were the warrior's steps beguiled :

Who with hungering eye had sought him
 For his manhood's martial grace,
Till that fatal morn she caught him
 In a wild and last embrace.

In the grand old English fashion,
 In the ecstasy of strife,
Fade the ruddy hues to ashen,
 Ebbs away the noble life.

God knows best—no fairer portal
 Could release the heroic soul
With the wreath of praise immortal
 Crowned triumphant at the goal.

Happier thus, ere daily wasting
 Slow consume the life and breath,
Till the spirit languish, tasting
 All the bitterness of death.

By a strange, mysterious boding,
Long that gallant spirit knew
Death impatient, ever goading
Valour to attempt and do.

Sure, most sure, in days of nature
Briefer than our common time,
Must that soul achieve her stature,
Perfected in youth sublime.

As the jewel from the casket,
Light to higher light aspires ;
Swift and bright as he would ask it,
Fate fulfilled his heart's desires.

From the Eastern sea soft breathing,
Shall the desert winds enfold
Wave on wave of sand, enwreathing
Heights above that goodly mould.

Of the battle and the slaughter,
Fast by Abu Klea's spring,
As they lead their flocks to water
Shall the Arab shepherds sing :

And the story shall be written
On the page that cannot die,
On the lip and heart of Britain :
Thus fell gallant Burnaby !

GORDON.

OH, the wail of wrath and woe !
Oh, too late was struck the blow
For our hero lying low,
Gordon left alone to die !

Now may England veil her face
'Neath the "indelible disgrace,"
He, the noblest of her race,
Boded with despairing cry.

Hope might perish, nature faint,
Yet the soldier and the saint
Bore aloft without a taint
England's banner of the free.

Great of heart, he went to save
England's fame, and lift the slave
From oppression's living grave,
With the promise, Liberty !

Life, as 'twere a worthless thing,
On the dust he dared to fling,
Passing, like a warrior king,
 On through death to victory !

His the glory, ours the blame
Of the attempt broke off with shame :
Not with water, but with flame
 Flashes every English eye.

Bleeding honour bids us on,
Till the grave thy arm has won
Plant beneath the southern sun
 Freedom's ensign, leal and true.

There is hope yet, if we close,
All as one man, to oppose
Brother's vengeance 'gainst thy foes—
 Thus, with God's help, up and do !

“VOX POPULI.”

Lo, a voice of power has spoken through the Islands of
the sea,

By the will of England’s people making protest full and
free—

To the war-cry of disunion, to the fatal, feeble sound
Of a whispered pact with treason, this the fitting answer
found :

“We are Britons, men and brothers, many races blent
in one ;

We will hold the grand tradition of our might in union ;
With the life that God has given, with the strength of
heart and hand,

We will do our whole endeavour not for self, but
motherland.”

Such the fixed resolve of millions, in the proud, triumphant
hour

Of the lowly new uprisen, of the toilers sprung to
power :

They have sense of England's honour, and the sturdy
freemen scorn
To desert the dear old Colours many a gallant son has
borne.

Every landmark of oppression, relic of a darker day,
Could the arm of Britain's manhood waved in thunder
sweep away ;
What could gold avail, or reverence, or the trembling
statesman's skill,
Crushed beneath the iron hammer of an angry people's
will ?

Not for right to live and labour, not for ease to patient
want,
Do the many rise in battle 'gainst the classes dominant :
"We will wait," they answer nobly, "rather bar our
righteous claim,
Than consent to foes within us, 'gainst our nation's peace
and fame."

Such the men who built an Empire in our farthest island
home ;
Such the will that baffled Cæsar's, and defied the arms
of Rome ;
Such the bowmen of our forests, such the shipmen stout
and bbold,
Rovers free of ocean's pathways, of whose valour bards
have told.

Such a band with their boy-hero bled at Créey and
Poictiers ; *

Such have stood and strove undaunted in the fatal
adverse day

When the stars have fought against them, till they steeled
their hearts to meet

Pale despair and death as comrades, for they would not
own defeat.

These are worthy to be trusted with the birth-right of the
free,

These who eat the bread of labour, heirs of broader days
to be :

Bid them welcome, lords and princes, own them brothers
leal and true :

This is noblest in the noblest—deal as God has dealt with
you.

May the love of Queen and people wipe the tears and
crimson stain

From the drooping face of Erin, till our sister smile
again ;

May her foes, and ours, be scattered, and the whole world
understand

We are one, from earth-born peasant to the Lady of the
land !

* Poictiers, as in French, to rhyme with day.

MERCEDES.

(*July, 1878.*)

“**T**HY fair young Queen is dead.” No sharper word
Has Fate to utter in a monarch’s ear ;
Nothing in life beyond that cry, once heard,
Remains to hope or fear.

Woe, woe ! upon the land of golden skies
The stroke of Heaven hath fall’n in scathful fire !
Spain’s Prince and people bow with weeping eyes
For loss of their desire.

So young, so rich in joy and beauty—dead !
Oh, God ! the Morrow of her natal day ;
With bridal wreath unfaded on her head,
Clay has returned to clay !

But yesterday fond lovers, heart in heart,
Knit by the holy band of marriage ring,
Thou and thy five months’ wife thought not to part
So soon—to-day, O King !

Borne to the dim Escorial vault, beneath
The fatal gate, corruption shall destroy
Love's flower and fruit—the stern cold rival, Death,
Possess thy dearest joy !

There, withering, the half-blown Rose of Spain
Waits for her love—not lost, but gone before—
In God's own garden ye shall meet again,
Where pain shall be no more.

Oli, live the worthier, for thou hast been blest !
Thy country be thy bride ! Thy pleasures now
In a great people's happiness ! So best
Youth's sorrow crowns man's brow.

THE PRINCESS ALICE.

(*December, 1878.*)

GONE to her father ! through the winter snows,
His voice from heaven has called her : " Alice, come !
This day I left thee, come, my child, to those
Who live in God's own home."

Pale sorrow from the rising of the sun
Dimmed all his course o'er England's realms that day,
Whose cry of anguish mourned their noblest one,
Scarce known till ta'en away.

For she loved much ; sweet love on earth is pain,
Mingling brief ecstasy with many a tear ;
Life lost for what it loves the heart counts gain
Whose treasure is not here.

She who received her father's parting sigh,
And wrung from death her brother's soul by prayer,
Spent o'er the wounded soldiers' agony
Her tender woman's care,

Forgot her own in sense of others' pangs,
And, while her husband strove for fatherland,
With dire disease and fever's silent fangs
She fought for her own hand !

The grave remembered her, and claimed his part,
A lamb of her fair flock, her youngest joy,
Whose brother's grief o'ercame her—on her heart
Too rash, she clasped her boy !

Death wooed her tenderly in that fond kiss
Of mutual sorrow for their eyes' desire ;
Thus her pure soul went forth to meet in bliss
Albert the Good, her sire.

Their lives were lovely—those whom God loves most
Belong not to our day ; earth borroweth
The fairest gems of heaven, too early lost,
Unseparate in death !

THE LIVING GOLD.

SPOKE the lord of many lands
To a lady wondrous fair :
“Say, did young Aurora’s hands
Spin the day-beams for thy hair ?
Glory pales to shadows cold
In their tender light of love,
And their mesh of living gold
Through and through my heart hath wove.

“In my bitter days of life,
Sweet my bride, thy golden head
O’er the toils of power and strife
One blest influence hath shed,
Soothed to peace my troubled breast—
Locks of love, ah ! when I die
Deeper peace should seal my rest
Could ye in my coffin lie.”

Came his words fulfilled in death ;
And that hair he loved so well,
Her despairing hand beneath,
Woman's crowning glory fell.
Love that fails not to the dead,
'Neath the marble pale and cold,
In the pillow for his head
Laid those locks of living gold.

PRESIDENT GARFIELD.

(*October 4th, 1881.*)

FROM the Royal seat of England
Tender words for human pain
Span the earth on wings of lightning,
Pierce the wind-swept Western Main,

Tell them in that house of sorrow
Where they mourn their slaughtered chief,
England's Queen, indeed a widow,
Hath a portion in their grief.

From the hour the death-stroke touched him,
Days, weeks, months of pangs untold,
While the undaunted spirit wrestled
With corruption's serpent fold.

Many a loving wife among us
Thrilled in sympathy with one
Ever near her husband's pillow,
Hoping—though she hoped alone.

Hers the woe no thought can measure
Nor the tongue's faint language tell,
But the widowed heart of England
Bleeds for sorrows known too well.

To his God, the Christian warrior,
Fearless, yields the immortal breath,
More than conqueror, unmastered
By the bitter pains of death.

Of such heroes earth unworthy
Sees their light with dazzled eyes,
Till they sink to rest in glory,
By their God-like sacrifice.

While the heavens bow down to meet him,
Bleeding from the murderer's hand,
Both worlds shall rejoice that sorrow
Bound them with a triple band.

LILIAN ADELAIDE NEILSON.

(*September, 1880.*)

GONE to thy rest so early ! Has the rose
Drooped on the stem, and yielded her sweet breath ?
Art thou no more, O fairest, but as those
Who fade in clay-cold death ?

Fame's burning lamp shone proudly on thy head
But yesterday—now withered in thy bloom,
The world's heart turns to sorrow for thee, dead
And laid into the tomb.

Thrice dear the laurel round the brow of youth !
By thy warm eloquent art thou hadst the spell
To set before our eyes in living truth
The saint-like Isabel,

And wifely Imogen ; and the true faith
Of Juliet, mystery of joy and woe,
Who, living, dared the sepulchre's foul breath
For her loved Romeo.

Ten golden years of triumph, in the light
 Of the world's glory, and thy tale is told ;
Closed are those wondrous eyes, before the night
 When patient grief grows old.

Great silence fills thy place that knows thee not :
 Grace, beauty, passion, genius, have their day,
But Shakespeare's child, a vision unforgot,
 Can never pass away.

A GOOD PHYSICIAN.

IN MEMORIAM, FRANCIS GOODCHILD.

(*March, 1883.*)

THOUGH early dead, he has not lived in vain
Who earned kind thoughts from those who knew him
best,
The weary watchers by the bed of pain,
Where hope came with him as a welcome guest.

As with unwearying step and quiet calm
He went upon his round from door to door,
His cheering words and pleasant ways left balm
To ease the sorrowful, the sick, the poor.

This was his mission—now the bow o'erwrought,
That bore so long, has broken on the strain ;
Hundreds of eyes are dimmed, and tongues have naught
But praise for him.—Is such a death no gain ?

Ay, for how few they are whose mortal years
Shall live, prolonged by memories so sweet ;
The children ask for him, who soothed their fears,
And drew their little steps about his feet.

And now the toiler rests from labour—deep
The slumber falls upon his painless breath ;
The Lord of Life gives His beloved sleep,
To bid us know how beautiful is death.

MR. WILSON BARRETT AS CLAUDIAN.

ART has its wonders, and the scenic glass
Bent on the world's light fashions as they pass
Can mirror noble lives of god-like men,
When genius fires and nature guides the pen.
The old heroic heights of tragic power
Yield to the daring poets of the hour,
And Claudian lives before us ! Earthly pride
In strength, and wealth, and power, personified ;
His scorn of others' woe, of living truth,
The punishment he bore : eternal youth ;
Repentance known too late, that fondly sought
By doing good to atone for evil wrought,
And self-abhorring 'neath the bitter cross :
So, out of sin's corruption and foul dross,
God's chastening hand draws forth the eternal gem,
A soul redeemed to fill His diadem.
So Claudian, the accurst, is taught to rise
From brutish lust to pure self-sacrifice ;

Tempted and tried by women's dearest love,
He rends his heart in twain, to seek above
Pardon and peace, and smiling, tells pale Death :
“ I see—I know,” and yields to God his breath.
Such is the man who lives before our eyes—
Sins, suffers, and repents, and grandly dies ;
If this be art, this is the highest, best,
That stirs the conscience in each human breast,
Passing through passion up to truth sublime,
The Drama's noblest image of our time.

MORNING LIGHT.

(*For my Godchildren, DAISY and MAY.*)

FATHER, while my soul is white,
Do Thou on my memory write
Words of truth in morning light.

Thou whose praise the angels sung,
When the stars on high were swung,
Keep my heart and rule my tongue ;

That no false or cruel word
From a breast with envy stirred
On these lips be ever heard.

Earthly father, mother dear,
With the angels watch me here,
From all danger keep me clear.

Near Thy throne, with Thy dear Son,
Suffer me, Thy little one,
Ere my battle has begun.

Teach me, in my early day,
How to trust Thee all my way,
How to love and how to pray.

WAT TYLER.

(A.D. 1381.)

O ENGLISH hearts, inclined
To the weak against the strong,
Will ye hear me, a Saxon woman,
The child of an earth-born yeoman,
Tell a tale of wrath and wrong ?

We were sprung from the land's old race
By the Norman dispossessed,
But my sire was stout and brave ;
Of the measure of life God gave
His hand would make the best.

Through Essex his smithy was known,
In the days when Richard our King,
That is slain so traitorously,
Was a youth of like years with me,
A maid in my flower of spring.

And the Royal boy was beloved
As the great Black Prince's heir,
Whose bride was the Maid of Kent,
The pearl of our English descent—
Joanna, the proud and fair.

But the cruel wars enforced
Our tribute of blood and tears ;
A tax was laid upon all
The people, both great and small,
From the age of fifteen years.

From each was the hard-earned coin
Compelled ; but in sullen rage,
My father, the sturdy smith,
Refused my tribute, sith
I was yet of tender age.

So the taxers bade me stand forth,
And they judged me woman grown :
I was tall of stature, and lithe
As the bending willow wither
By the breath of the morning blown.

I felt a rough, rude hand
That was twisted in my hair ;
My kerchief plucked off ; and then
To the gaze and scorn of men
Did they show my bosom bare.

They mocked my writhing shame
And the searlet flush of my cheek ;
That the cry of curdling blood
From the heart of my womanhood
Went up in one bitter shriek.

There was help in the strong right hand,
Revenge in the eyes afire :
The blur of my womanhood
That instant was washed in blood
By the mighty smith, my sire.

One stroke of his hammer came down
And smote the ruffian dead ;
I fell on his bosom, safe :
I felt his fingers chafe
My hot and sinking head.

Like the hop-vine 'bout the pole
Her creeping clusters flings,
The sweep of my hair unbound
In fiery flashes round
My father's body clings.

The people's voice rose up
With a ringing cheer, " Well done ! "
The lion was roused, and woke
At the fall of that hammer's stroke
With a roar of revolt begun.

“To arms !” cry the men of Kent ;
“No tyrants shall crush us down !”
Like waves of fire borne hither,
From the north and east they gather
To march on London town.

My father, the dauntless smith,
On that sea of wrath was borne ;
I clung to his bosom, fast
As the shipboy to the mast
From the wave-swept wreckage torn.

Full many a barbarous deed
I, shuddering, saw that hour,
When the surge from the earth uprose
O'er the God-forsaken foes
That were left in the people's power.

The noble had spurned the wolf
While he crouched behind the door ;
But now, o'er a land of death
The proud lay strewn beneath
The vengeance of the poor.

That time, on a pilgrimage
To Canterbury went
A widow and sorrowing,
The mother of the King,
She who was the Fair Maid of Kent.

She who was the rose of love
On the breast of our gallant Black Prince,
Our hope death-stricken so young ;
Ah, woe ! for the havoc and wrong
That have vexed fair England since !

Our tryst was on Blackheath ;
One hundred thousand there
Had swelled to a rabble rout,
That thundered with threatening shout
At sight of that Princess fair.

Through their midst she was fain to pass
With her maids, and her henchmen true
To shield her from treason's breath ;
But the crowd rose strong as death
And o'er bore those faithful few.

Then, sturdy and overbold,
Wat Tyler seized her waist :
The cheek whose roseate bloom
Had drooped o'er Edward's tomb
The ruffian strove to taste.

She turned and faced her fear,
Her dove-like eyes aflame ;
“ I was Edward's wife,” she said,
“ For the sake of our hero dead
Let me perish untouched by shame ! ”

Then my father, the gallant smith,
Fell low upon his knee :
“ My life for your name and fame ;
Is not virtue in Queens the same
As in maidens of low degree ? ”

“ But say you are of one blood
With the children of want and toil.
On my forehead’s grime and sweat,
You, lady, lips may set,
Unscathed by taint or soil.”

Kneeling, he kisses her hand,
And she stooped her queenly height ;
Her sweet lips did him grace,
For in my father’s face
Spoke the heart of a loyal knight.

Harmless, he bore her through
From the wrathful people’s power ;
One moment he stemmed the flood,
Whose fury unwithstood
Swept onwards to the Tower.

A hell of blood and fire
Broke forth and drank its fill,
Till the awful stones were red,
And many a lordly head
Had fallen to the cry, “ Kill, kill ! ”

Wat Tyler, the rebel chief,
Trod London 'neath his heel ;
'Twas then the King rode forth,
To sweep him off the earth
With knightly arm of steel.

Heroic Edward's son
Rose at the godless band,
And fury armed his youth
To chase and kill without ruth
The wolf from off the land.

Wat Tyler slain at his feet,
Avenged a mother's fears :
There was death in the wrathful groan
Of the crowd—till Richard, alone,
Came forth to the mutineers.

“ My people,” the sovereign spake,
“ What means this murmuring ?
Are ye vexed for your leader dead ?
Nay, I'll be your leader, your head,
Your chief—I am your King ! ”

And of his Royal grace,
He restored our ancient laws,
Our liberties—our rights—
With pardon to each who fights
Upon that sacred cause.

He is dead by our tyrants' hands—
 But his deeds shall never die,
Till manhood, broken tame,
Set light by England's fame
 In her women's purity.

CASSANDRA.

(*Founded on the “Agamemnon” of Æschylus.*)

A LIGHT of glory o'er the purple seas
Furrows the waters of the Cyclades ;
Lo, westward, in Hyperion's radiant track,
A tall-prowed ship towards Argos bearing back
The conqueror, Agamemnon, King of men,
Who through the summer heat of harvests ten
Wearied and bled before the walls of Troy
Now level with the dust ; so, with great joy
Homeward he steers, possessed of his desire,
Or ere the midday glow of passion's fire
Had 'bated of its strength, or 'gun to wane
'Neath the cold touch of age or stress of pain.
'Midst spoil past count, the riches of his ship,
Captive Cassandra sits, with quivering lip,
Shrinking beneath his gaze for shame, and ruth
To know and utter the abhorred truth.

I. I.

AGAMEMNON.

Look in my eyes that plead with thee ;
Give me thy heart, mine own, be not afraid
Of Love, whose arrows wounded me
With yearning after my prophetic maid.
Why dost thou shrink and start so wild ?

CASSANDRA.

Am I not slaughtered Priam's child ?
To what dark fate dost lead me forth, O King ?

AGAMEMNON.

To love and honour, everything
Thy dearest wish can dream of.

CASSANDRA.

Say'st thou so ?

Nay, rather in the depth of woe,
Treacherous snare and bloody grave,
Blindly thou fall'st, and I—must follow thee, thy slave.

I. 2.

AGAMEMNON.

Priestess, what art thou raving of ?
My royal palace shall thy temple be.
Can I forget the taste of love
Alone with thee upon the lonely sea ?

CASSANDRA.

Can I forget the awful light
 Kindling our nuptial torch that night,
 When thou and I by fraud and force were wed ?
 When Furies strewed our marriage bed
 Upon the smouldering ashes of my home ?
 I saw my wretched mother come,
 A corpse-like form, down to the sea,
 To shriek a wild farewell and look her last on me.

I. 3.

AGAMEMNON.

Cannot my love and sovereign sway
 Charm harsh memories away ?
 Hath not the envied name of wife
 Knit thee to thy master's life ?

CASSANDRA.

And will the gods forget
 That hideous spousal, nor my wrong repay ?
 My prayer for vengeance though my lip unsay,
 Their justice will accomplish yet ;
 Though I be humbled, tame,
 Yielding to pardon shame,
 And all my being cling
 In sorrow for thy fate to thee, my King !
 Why didst thou spare to slay
 Me, hallowed maid, nor suffer me to rest

With godlike Hector, and fair Paris, whom
To love was mortal doom ?

Lo, here I cast my crown away,
And rend the sacred robe upon my breast,
Thus, thus upon the scattering whirlwind driven,
Perish this once pure form, by murder rent and riven !

II. 1.

AGAMEMNON.

Thou canst not sever from my fate
By augury of evil-boding breath ;
Thee will I hold, my chosen mate,
In love's strong fetters, or in bonds of death.
Lives there within my subject land
The man can wrest thee from my hand ?

CASSANDRA.

Woe worth the day ! ah, whither do we go ?
Not to thy royal home, no, no !
Mock not the gods, nor make the queen thy wife
The keeper of thy days of life ;
For woman's love and hate are strong
To breed prolific hate and answer wrong.

II. 2.

AGAMEMNON.

Come not her name between us ! Let
Fond trust outweigh thy fantasy o'erwrought ;
Why dost thou strive within the net
Limed like a bird, a wild thing newly caught ?

CASSANDRA.

Wilt lure me with deceitful vows
 Into that human slaughter-house,
 Where thy forsaken lioness has lain
 With the foul wolf, until they twain
 Are one in guilt, and she makes sharp the sword
 A woman, 'gainst her wedded lord ;
 Thee, thee, my master, will she smite,
 Yea, for my bringing home with thrusts of steel requite !

II. 3.

AGAMEMNON.

Have I not power on thee, my thrall,
 I, who chose thee, best of all
 Triumphant Grecia's home-bound fleet
 Cast before her leader's feet !
 Art thou not radiant fair,
 That spurned the sun-god's love ? Shall I forego
 My will and pleasure, I, the King, who know
 Thy beauty worth the world I dare !

CASSANDRA.

Woe, woe ! within thy gate
 Thou leadest me, thy Fate ;
 By retribution strange
 I follow thee, a Fury to avenge
 The slaughter of my race ;
 Victorious, among my foes I come,
 Urged by the gods, a weapon to fulfil
 Their curse, against my will.

Wouldst thou the child of death embrace,
Suck aspic's poison in the kiss of love ?
Nay, cast me to the shades beneath, for I
Am last of Priam's blood, and I too dare to die !

III. 1.

AGAMEMNON.

Live, live, sweet guest ! to bring delight
Like warmth in winter to thy master's hearth,
And pay with jocund hours of mirth
Ten wasted years of toil and desperate fight ;
Bid me forget the past, to sip
The future on thy glowing lip !

CASSANDRA.

Oh, thou wilt not believe me ! foe and friend
Reject my warning to the end !
My cry of horror for the woes hereafter
Provokes thy scorn and mocking laughter ;
In vain some strange, relenting charm
Asks my last drop of blood to shield thy life from harm.

III. 2.

What fire of doom has lit mine eye ?
A woman's hand, false and adulterous,
As prey for slaughter meshes us—
Not without honour from the gods we die !
To thee I pray, all glorious sun
I nevermore shall look upon,

By this, for me, thy last, last sinking light,
 On my foul murderers requite
 Mine, a slave's death, with his, I mourn and pity
 Far, far beyond my native city ;
 For death to misery is kind,
 And thou from kingly state fall'st like the deaf and
 blind !

III. 3.

Closed were her lips, the awful weird
 Glanced upon his ear unfear'd ;
 While through the thickening dark of night
 Torches flashed from height to height
 The tale of victory
 O'er fallen Troy ; from Ida's loftiest peak
 The news did mountain unto mountain speak
 By fire across th' Aegean sea ;
 Till Argos saw, amazed,
 And Clytemnestra gazed
 Upon the heavens ashine
 With beacon flames, and knew the appointed sign.
 Her smooth, caressing tongue
 Could rouse the sleeping Furies on their prey ;
 While blinded Agamemnon by her side
 Walked like a god in pride,
 Her arms about his neck she flung
 To hide the steel her hand had clutched to slay.
 Troy's daughter died avenged : from out one grave
 Their blood cried up to heaven, the King beside his
 slave.

PUDENS AND CLAUDIA.

Under the reign of Nero, A.D. 57, Pomponia Græcina, wife of Aulus Plautius—who, upon his return from Britain, entered the city in ovation—was accused of “foreign superstition,” and committed to the judgment of her husband and family, who pronounced her innocent. She lived many years, wearing no habit but mourning, and in continual sadness, which ultimately redounded to her honour. (Tacitus, Annales, lib. xiii., ch. xxxii.)

Claudia, wife of Aulus Pudens, was a British princess connected by family ties with Pomponia Græcina. (2 Timothy iv. 21.)

POMPONIA.

AND is it thou, my daughter, that art fain
To weep in loving arms? What aileth thee,
Blest as a wife and mother? In thy pain
Why dost thou seek me?

CLAUDIA.

My husband—Aulus—from my soul is torn
By Nero’s ruthless hand—condemned to lie
Beneath the arena’s pit of blood till morn—
Ay, and he must die!

POMPONIA.

A blessed martyr ! Shall thy heart despair,
 Yielding thy treasure unto God in faith ?
 Your souls are one in Him—immortal pair,
 Why should ye fear death ?

CLAUDIA.

Come, Death, take both together—oh, my heart !
 Life without him—’tis more than I can bear !
 Entreat our Father that we may not part ;
 Pity me—make prayer.

POMPONIA.

Nay, leave it in His hands, nor death nor life
 Can part ye long ; but I have lived estranged
 Beneath my husband’s roof, no more his wife,
 Parted, and heart-changed.

My hero—how I worshipped him ! Too fond,
 My life’s one passion to its idol clove ;
 God had not joined us in an equal bond :
 That is the true love.

The light from heaven he knew not ; cold and blind,
 My joy he loathed, my hope he could not see,
 But heard the slanderer’s tongue, the evil mind,
 Testify ’gainst me.

CLAUDIA.

But did he not absolve thee, when thy home
Was turned to a tribunal, and thy kin,
For worship alien to the gods of Rome,
Charged thee with strange sin ?

POMPONIA.

His lip was bold and faithful to proclaim
Mine innocence, and from the lion's tooth
Keep my pure body, and restore my name
Tainted for God's truth.

The foes of mine own house he held at bay ;
My life and fame were safe within his door :
But ever since that unforgotten day,
Saw'st thou me smile more ?

CLAUDIA.

True, true, thou liv'st a martyr, saint of God !
Though they had torn my body limb by limb,
I could have borne 't, resisting unto blood,
So they had spared him,

My soul's beloved—on the day I stood,
A trembling captive, by my father's side,
In yon dread forum—he, the brave, the good,
Chose me his strange bride,

A British maid, the spoil of Roman swords,
 The conquered daughter of Caraetacus :—
 They thrill my ears e'en now, the few sweet words
 Whispered between us.

Was all in vain ? My father's overthrow,
 My country's chains ? Would God that Britain's
 shore
 Had bounded in our mingled lives, to know
 Never desire more,
 Beyond the beauty of the sea and land,
 And Nature's treasures there so richly given,
 It seemed as if the great Creator's hand
 Made of our earth, heaven.

POMPONIA.

Hast thou forgot, thou comest of a race
 Foredoomed of Heaven to rise by truth sublime
 O'er heathen Rome triumphant, in her place
 Chosen for all time ?

Know'st not the daughter of a King thou art,
 Whose spirit taught the Roman to revere
 The captive 'neath his foot, too great of heart
 Ever to see fear ?

No iron chain could bind him—was't for naught
 A Briton looked on Cæsar's face unawed ?
 Dwelt 'mongst his foes in honour, and was taught
 Wisdom to see God ?

He bears the message of no earthly Lord
To Britain's utmost verge, with mastery
O'er fate and passion, mightier than the sword,
Setting the soul free.

Thou art his child ; and if thy heart of woman,
Plucked from its roots of love, be cast, alone,
God's chosen weapon 'gainst the fierce-browed Roman ,
Why should'st thou make moan ?

CLAUDIA.

O God, our time of joy—our wedded home
Upon Thy earth the happiest and most blest,
Where all Thy children in this awful Rome
Clustered and found rest !

Our dear, dear home, where never breath of strife
Troubled our love's first fragrance, since we clung,
Strong tree, frail flower, the husband and the wife,
Together, both young.

Graft to a stem of heroes, I have borne
To thee, mine own, most fair and precious fruit
Of lovely children—who shall help us, torn
Off from our lives' root ?

Ah blind ! that day thy god-like kinsman, Paul,
By Nero's bloodhounds from our hearth was reft,
I thought not we should hear that dreadful call :
One taken—one left !

POMPONIA.

Women have looked upon the sons they bore
 Dying in torment, and the mother's voice
 Has bade their quivering flesh endure the more,
 Whispering of heaven's joys.

CLAUDIA.

But I am weak—my grief will cry and strive—
 O Father ! can I be Thy child forgiven,
 Most miserable now of things that live,
 Happiest, yestereven ?

POMPONIA.

Endure and conquer ! 'neath the stroke that mars
 The beauty of your lives, canst thou not trust
 Thy darling to the hand that made the stars,
 Passing, as man must,

Through nature's anguish to the light eterne ;
 Yet flashing back to earth from heaven a ray
 Of quenchless hope that evermore shall burn,
 Making the night day ?

And though a sharper sword than death shall sever
 One flesh of God united, ask not what
 Thy bleeding heart shall rest on—but for ever
 Trust Him, and fear not !

CLAUDIA.

I would do so—look, look ! the morning sun—
I hear the cry for blood—the lions' roar—
The hour is come—my true and loving one—
Never to meet more !

It cannot be—the light of day turns dim—
The ice of death with life's hot current wars
Curdling about my heart—each shuddering limb
Sinks like a dead corse !

POMPONIA.

Claudia, come back ! Dost hear ? A cry of doom
Rouses the city's sleep—lift up thy head,
Thy husband lives—the curse has passed from Rome :
Nero is dead !

CLAUDIA.

Dead !

THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR.

(Founded on the Picture by Paul Delaroche.)

As the world's dread lord, in earth's highest place,
Sat the last of the Cæsars' Imperial race,

Domitian—o'er a sea of blood
In the face of heaven and earth he stood,
And lifted his head as Lord and God.

With heart of hate and with trembling limb
Men kissed the dust as they worshipped him.

The pomp and lust of his golden home
Were fed by the noblest beauty of Rome,
And maid and wife, at his beck and call,
Of the whole world's fairest were gathered all,
While Roman husband and sire stood, tame,
By the death of honour, and knew no shame.
And yet, beneath his all-licensed power
One radiant girl, like an opening flower,

In her pure and heavenly beauty sprung,
And wisdom, strange in one so young ;
All the glory and pride of her princely birth
Were accounted as naught to her own true worth.

Sweet Julia ! those were days of joy
When we grew together as girl and boy,

Till with a power thou knew'st not of,
Thy charms, unconscious, around me wove
The deep mysterious spells of love.

And mine was the crown of earthly bliss
To seal thee with the betrothal kiss,

Thy lover Cladius : even now,
With sinking heart and shooting brow
I can hear afar her murmured vow.

Of my wondrous chance, of her beauty's fame,
To Cæsar's court the rumour came ;

On his weary throne Domitian heard
With quickening pulses, envy-stirred,

And longings seized him to feed his eye
On the loveliest form in Italy.

A shriek of 'wilder'd pain and affright
Went up to heaven at dead of night,

Then Julia bows her head to weep
Like some wild creature surprised in sleep,
And through her pulses pale shudderings creep.

By fraud and force the maid o'ereome,
Is borne before the tyrant of Rome ;

The lust and menace of his eye
She meets with answer : “ I dare to die.”

But who shall answer the slanderous blur
Of a whispered breath that hath tainted her ?

With a lover's passion jealous, rash,
I saw her writhe 'neath the false tongues' lash,

And to snatch her pure from the serpent's hiss,
I found, despairing, no way but this :

“ We are Christians, Cæsar, she and I :
We will pass through death to liberty.”
So I spoke to Domitian, eye to eye.

The people heard—and a mighty yell
“ To the lions ! ” broke from the mouth of hell

Where the awful walls and pillars stood
Round the sands compact with human blood,

Where the slaughter of men makes common sport
For the Roman rabble and Roman court,

And their women's eyes o'er the feast of gore
Burn fierce with joy, as the surge and roar
Of the many thousands rise up for “ more ! ”

As in the valley of death I stand,
With my promised bride, on the fatal sand,

Methinks I sweep with searching eye
From tier to tier, where safe and high,
The broadening circles met the sky,

And wave above wave, the whole vast space
Was filled like a sea with the human face.

As the whirlpool clutches the sinking ship
They hurled their prey to the lion's grip ;

Then close to Julia's side I clung,
And horror and pity loosed my tongue

To plead for mercy : " Set her free ;
Unbar your lions' dens on me ! "

She lifted her eyes to Cæsar's seat,
And their speechless prayers for my life entreat—

His muttered whisper swift replies :
" Both may live yet—thou know'st the price."

She knew—I saw her white cheek flush
With the virgin blood's indignant rush—

A crash of iron—a sudden spring—
And my limbs stood locked and shuddering ;

A lion faced me with sullen roar,
And bristling hairs attaint with gore ;

I knew his hungry eyes on mine,
And the eager arch of his quivering spine—

Beneath his deadly rush we fell—
And what came after, I cannot tell—

I felt the monster sniff and stir,
And with my body I shielded her.

We were left for dead together, till
The stars bore witness, calm and still,
Of man's fierce lust to rend and kill.

The lion had spared her—the hot sand's thirst
Was slaked from my veins by the keen teeth pierced !

She rose to her feet at my living cry,
And called the Christians watching nigh
To comfort the victims to live or die.

Like the wretch exhausted on the rack
I had dreamed of succour—she came not back—

I was found, alive, on the blood-steeped sands,
And borne away by pitying hands ;

But of her they knew not—as in a dream,
I wandered down by the Tiber's stream—

Upborne and lifted from my bed
Whither hope's delirious fancy led—

And lo ! beneath pale Hesper's gleam,
White shadows drifting down the stream—

I knew her face by the halo shed
Above the virgin martyr's head—

I saw it all—Domitian found
His victim 'seaped, and she was drowned
By his revenge—her hands were bound.

I, Claudius, paid him ! Is 't need to tell
By what slave's death Domitian fell ?

The scourge of God, the curse of Rome,
Domestic treason compassed his doom ;
But this was the hand that struck him home !

EZEKIEL.

(Ch. xxiv., v. 16.)

EZEKIEL.

No more ! for I am man—the God of heaven
Has shivered at a stroke my cup of bliss ;
No word of her, my wife who died last even,
No look—no parting kiss :

For I must do a hard and dread command,
And utter forth a voicee in words of fire
Out of my heart, bruised by His heavy hand
Who took my eyes' desire.

Be the cold earth a pillow for her head
Warm from my breast, my bride of yester-year,
Reft with the promise of our marriage bed—
And I must shed no tear !

AN ELDER OF ISRAEL.

O son ! what means that awful look of stone ?
Death is within thy guestchamber ; the cry
Of women breaketh forth with bitter moan,
And yet thy eyes are dry.

Wilt thou not say, what are these things to us
Of the captivity ? for some dark truth
Speaks through thy every act, who bearest thus
The blasting of thy youth.

EZEKIEL.

Thou sayest well ; through me the Eternal Word
Speaks to the House of Israel by a sign :
The hearts of all this people shall be stirred
With greater woe than mine.

When Zion's beauty, by the Chaldees' host
Profaned, shall be polluted and abhorred ;
Your sons, your daughters, all your soul loves most,
The harvest of the sword.

And ye who listen now by Chebar's stream
As to a singer's very lovely voice,
Holding my words no weightier than a dream
Which waking sense destroys,

Ye too shall read aright this life of mine
That sheweth forth to what yourselves must come ;
Then shall Ezekiel be to you a sign,
My deeds no longer dumb.

A DAUGHTER OF ISRAEL.

And what hast thou to do with love of woman
Or hope of sons, thou stern and awful seer,
Whose heart of adamant no passion human,
No pity knows, nor fear ?

To thee was given her tender virginhood
 In this strange land to build thee up a home ;
 Yet, to fulfil a dream, thou sawest good
 To strike thy tent and roam.

The hard, rough life was more than she could bear ;
 Yet never murmuring, 'neath thy cruel eye
 She sank beside the way, in wan despair,
 To travail and to die.

Thy kiss fell deadly as the adder's tooth
 Upon that love-warm bosom—mortal sleep
 Seals up those purple lids—and thou, forsooth,
 Canst neither moan nor weep !

EZEKIEL.

Daughter of Zion, canst not understand
 This misery beyond all common woe ?
 Jerusalem's Princee, thy people and thy land,
 This day, the like shall know.

What are our single sorrows ? Let them eat
 The kindly bread of comfort, who can pour
 The parting tears on the belovèd feet
 That may not enter more.

I bear the burthen of a nation's sin,
 Living my life far bitterer than death,
 Since God from that sweet flesh hath gathered in
 His spirit and His breath.

Why will you bruise the broken heart? Even now
The pang has passed—and she has done with pain;
Shall not death's mystery, though we know not how,
Knit soul to soul again?

The house of silence to my feet shall ope
The doors of Eden, that lost Paradise,
The promise of a memory and a hope
Not seen with fleshly eyes.

Farther than foot of man has ever trod,
Where souls are borne to everlasting rest,
My love shall meet me in the garden of God,
Her babe upon her breast.

A PRINCE OF ISRAEL.

Fond, patient fool! What profit shalt thou have
For all thy joy and honour cast away?
Look'st thou beneath for pleasures in thy grave,
When thou hast done thy day?

What is this God, that we should worship Him,
Who dwells in darkness silent and afar?
Have heaven's bright lights before our eyes waxed dim
In sun and moon and star?

Lo! we, the servants of a God unseen,
Must spend our strength upon the strangers' land
We made that God our trust—and we have been
Sold captives to their hand:

While they, the haughty lords of Babylon,
 With pomps and pleasures fill her cloud-girt towers ;
 Then turn like them thy eyes to yonder sun
 And say, “ Their gods be ours ! ”

EZEKIEL.

Mark me, thou scorner ! now, even now, this day,
 Babylon’s Prince, the mighty King of Kings,
 Standeth before the parting of the way,
 An eagle with great wings.

By flight of arrows falls the lot, on whom
 The rushing thunder of his swoop shall light ;
 Ho ! for Jerusalem ! the sign of doom
 Points onward towards the right.

Take off the crown, remove the diadem,
 Thou evil King of Judah, for this day,
 The sword of vengeance in Jerusalem
 Is lord, to smite and slay.

And you, her alienated race, who feed
 On shame among the heathen, you, even you,
 Corrupt, stiff-hearted sons, in very deed,
 Shall prove my words are true.

A PRINCE OF ISRAEL.

Is this to me ? Thou boastful, railing priest,
 The King of Babylon, my sovereign lord,
 Holds all our lives, the greatest and the least,
 Upon his breath and word.

Prophesy not of evil things, nor dare
To whisper aught against the gods he serves,
Lest on thyself his wrath descend, nor spare
The sword thy speech deserves.

EZEKIEL.

O enemy of truth ! I know thy will
To quench the spirit of God, the word I bear ;
Yet what is life to me, if hate can kill,
That I should greatly care ?

In heaven and earth I fear no other than
The One I saw upon the sapphire throne,
A vision of fire in likeness of a man ;
Him I have heard and known.

Should I draw back my feet from snares of death,
Whose joy is dark, but for this certain trust :
The Lord of life accomplisheth His faith
To them who sleep in dust ?

Behold ! our graves shall open at His word ;
The winds shall breathe His breath upon the slain,
Till the dried bones of rottenness be stirred,
And Israel live again !

A DAUGHTER OF ISRAEL.

O master, thou art wise and apt to weave
In wondrous language thy prophetic song ;
Almost thou canst beguile our hearts that grieve
To bear their bitter wrong.

But say, wilt thou lift up the brow of shame,
 Give back our husbands and our little ones,
 All that we loved, devoured by sword and flame,
 Or dashed against the stones ?

While we, their murderers' spoil, must tune to mirth
 Our voice of weeping, at the harsh command
 Of those who make us viler than the earth,
 Slaves in this alien land.

Shall we be patient ? Can our hearts endure,
 Thus panting sore athirst for their revenge ?
 Then let it come like Israel's curse—as sure,
 As horrible, as strange !

EZEKIEL.

Woman, thy sorrow passes not the sum
 Of woe, thy birthright from thy mother Eve ;
 Yet to thy pain the balm of tears may come,
 The ease to cry and grieve :

Not for the man whose soul and flesh are wrung
 By thankless Israel is such fond relief ;
 Dumb misery's gall must wither up my tongue,
 And lips o'erfraught with grief.

AN ELDER OF ISRAEL.

Speak'st thou no word of hope ? Will God destroy
 From under heaven and blot out our name,
 Or shall we live to fill the isles with joy,
 That have not heard His fame ?

EZEKIEL.

Yea, thus it shall be, men of mocking speech :

“ I pray you come and hear what is the word
Of prophecy ”—ye mutter each to each—
“ That cometh from the Lord.”

Much love my people show me with their mouth,
And sit and listen to the minstrel’s strain,
The while their hearts within them burn with drouth
Of foul dishonest gain.

Yet though He scatter them like ashes cast
Upon the winds of heaven, they shall dwell
Once more upon the mount His strength set fast,
The Rock of Israel :

His living witness ’mong the sons of men
With showers of blessing, till the stars wax old,
And in His likeness we shall waken, when
New heaven and earth unfold !

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

I, NEBUCHADNEZZAR, King of kings,
Now Lord once more of all earthly things,

Lift up mine eyes to the God of heaven,
By whom mine honour and might were given.

My Chaldees and captains seek unto me ;
For my kingdom's glory and majesty

While I live are mine—and beside me, none
May sway the sceptre in Babylon ;
Not Evil-Merodach, my son.

My mind is come back, that wandered, lost,
Since I walked in pride, and made my boast,
I had built this city at mine own cost.

Stand by my bed, thou Hebrew youth,
Whom fear nor favour could turn from truth :

Dismiss the rest—I have lived my life—
But call Nitocris, the Prince's wife,
And Belshazzar, the heir to a realm of strife.

Let them hear me speak—’twill not be for long—
Time was, these sinews, lithe and strong,

Bore down the lion turned to bay :
They shall soon be made corruption’s prey.

Even now I struggle, and gasp for breath,
At handgrips with the hunter, Death.

Is this Nitocris ? Child, set thou
My hand on thy Belshazzar’s brow,
And mark me—nearer—mine eyes are dim—
So the evil to come may be turned from him !

NITOCRIS.

My King, my father, what words are these ?
My boy asks a blessing at thy knees !

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

I sprung in strength from a feeble sire,
Who lent me power to my heart’s desire ;

And launched me like a thunderbolt
On the subject nations who dared revolt ;

The God of the Jews gave into my hands
The Prince and nobles of their lands,
Whom I sent to Babylon bound with bands ;

And I had my will and wildest wish
Upon Egypt’s hosts at Charchemish.

My father dying, I sat alone
Sole sovereign Lord on his royal throne.

My will was law—who questioned me ?
But my spirit was troubled with woes to be.

When with closèd eyes on my bed I lay
A vision of horror stood there alway,

Till sleep broke from me, and memory lost
Each sight by thick-coming changes crossed,

And left me with a sense of pain
For loss to my race and my kingdom's wane
Imprinted on my burning brain.

Not a man on earth could show this thing
To any ruler, lord or king,

None but the gods who dwell on high—
So all my wise men made reply.

And in my fury I gave command
To slay them all from the face of the land,
And thou too, Daniel, wert brought to die—
But my frenzy yielded beneath thine eye.

When thou didst recall my dream, I knew,
Remembering all, thy words were true ;

And calm and patient, I heard thee say
How my life's long labour should pass away ;

And now I see, what thou didst unfold,
My likeness in that head of gold ;

By the silver arms and breast, I know
The kingdom of my Persian foe,

Whose gathering hosts, though less than mine,
With their chariots and arms of silv'rn shine,
Shall smite and spoil my royal line.

And the thighs and body of brass bespeak
The day of the brazen-coated Greek,

Avenger of fallen Babylon ;
For the empire of earth shall ever be won,
As the peoples rise, in the path of the sun.

The feet of iron and miry clay,
A fierce, yet broken power betray,
Who shall plough on the earth and the ocean foam
The name, scarce whispered yet, off Rome.

I saw, till a stone, cut out without hands,
Broke up those kingdoms to desert sands ;

Gold, brass and iron were no more
But chaff of the summer threshing floor,
Swept far away in the wild wind's mirth,
And the stone that smote them filled the earth.

To me, the King, thy God made known
His secret purpose by this stone ;
No kingdom on earth shall stand but His own.

And low upon my face did I fall,
And on my right hand set thee, my thrall,
That didst understand and interpret all.

NITOCRIS.

A wife—a mother—’twere mine to rue
The day that should prove thy saying true.

DANIEL.

And I, God’s prophet, bid thee restore
The heirs of Judah’s house, before
Their wrongs come home to thine own door.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Was I an oppressor, to seek my dues
Of ancient tribute from the Jews,
Which their King did impiously refuse ?

My vassal, thrice conquered, who bore unawed
The name I gave him, “ Justice of God,”
I, Jehovah’s sword and iron rod.

Like a lion’s spring was my manhood’s rage—
Ah, Daniel, my son, no touch of age
Had changed thee yet to a bearded sage !

Was I not just ? that found no room
For mercy in a traitor’s doom,

Who clave to the way his fathers trod
Of foul revolt against their God,

And brought those woes to pass, foretold
Against their city by prophets of old.

God’s purpose was fulfilled on them,
When I laid straight siege to Jerusalem.

Two years my leaguer they withstood,
Till my slings and arrows were drunk with blood ;
And burnt with hunger, devoured with heat,
Of the children's flesh did the fathers eat,
Ere the stubborn necks would bow to defeat.

DANIEL.

The tender woman in want so sore
Could slay and feed on the babe she bore,
And curse with her eye those lips whose kiss
Had brought such fruit of love as this,
To thirst for the blood that was hers and his.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

The city fell to my assault ;
God dealt according to their fault
With king and priest made captive there,
For by His name I had made them swear !

DANIEL.

Thy work that day was rash and hot :
I pray, to thy charge He may lay it not.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Was I cruel ? by Riblah's stream
I see the shadows pass on like a dream :
Above, upon my glorious throne
A conquering King, I sit alone,

And wheeling past my feet below,
My armèd hosts, with sword and bow,
Like mighty rivers glittering flow.

Up unto heaven above me rings
The sound of harps with many strings,
And shout of men : “ Hail, King of kings ! ”

There to be judged, my archers led
Judah’s pale Prince, and on his head
We passed a rebel’s sentence dread.

Was I cruel ? before his face
I crushed the buds of his evil race :

Those false eyes looked their last upon
The quivering limbs of his youngest son,
Ere he went in fetters to Babylon.

Enough for violated faith !
I gave him life when he prayed for death :

Yet ’neath my own closed lids will rise
The vision of those bleeding eyes !

Hide them beneath the earth ! I gave
Rich odours to burn and a royal grave
For his corse, who lived long years my slave,

Till he died in Babylon under my yoke,
After the word his prophets spoke,
For the oath he despised and the pledge he broke.

Did I not right ? By the God of heaven
The scourge of His wrath to my hand was given,

To smite that city of the King
With the poison of asps and the dragon's sting.

DANIEL.

With a laugh of scorn thy chiefs behold
The hairs of snow and the hairs of gold,
By vain despair's resistance reft,
Still clinging round each bloody heft.

The babe within his mother's womb
Escaped not in that day of doom !

The sword cut off like the water's foam
The pomp of Judah's royal home ;

And lest red slaughter's arm should tire,
The beams of cedar were set on fire,
Consuming even unto the ark of God,
In the holiest place of His own abode :

Then all around thy guards broke down
The walls of that rebellious town.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

What spoil we took no man can tell,
Save the priests who wax rich in the temple of Bel !

The war's first fruits to me belong,
Young men, fair virgins, the wise and strong:

Their souls and bodies are made my spoil,
To build my name on the rock, and toil
For life's bare needs on a foreign soil.

DANIEL.

God knew this people as His own
Whose faces thou didst grind to stone.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Zion I crushed—yet the Prince of Tyre
Provoked me to smite her walls with fire,
When he said : “Aha ! I am a god
That sit in the sea’s heart, deep and broad.”

Then we, his scornful boast to tame,
The terrible of nations came,
Strange hosts of many an outland name.

Shall iron break the chariot wheel,
The northern iron and the steel ?

The tread of men, the tramp of horse,
Sweep on ’gainst Tyre with the sound and force
Of floods broke loose in the watercourse.

Yet still the untamed sea-fortress rears
Her stubborn head through the wingèd years,
Till all the manhood of my realm
Bent their bald heads beneath the helm,

And burthens galled the shoulders of strength
Through the slow and weary siege’s length.

When all was done, and the city ta’en,
My years, my treasures, the blood of my slain,
I had spent them all and my labour was vain !

In the still of night, o'er the trackless sea,
The children of ocean, undaunted and free,
With a nation's ransom fled from me.

DANIEL.

Then God, for on Tyre thou hadst done His hest,
Led on thy armies towards the West.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Woe worth the day ! for loss and pain
To the peoples who chafed beneath my reign ;
By my sword in Egypt fell the slain !

Her teeming race for my slaves I took,
Her river I used as my water brook,
In her dragon's jaws I set a hook.

The Ethiop, and the Lybian far,
Where rank rebellion's branches are,
Taste of the bitter fruits of war.

'Neath distant skies less known than these,
Beyond the Pillars of Hercules,
I stretched my arm o'er lands and seas ;

Yea, from the sea of the rising sun
To the depths that hide him when day is done,
Earth's empire by my sword was won.

When my hands to spoil found nothing worth,
Homeward I fared by the chilly North :

With riches past count, with might and fame
 Beyond my youth's desires, I came
 To the golden city of my birth,
 The glory and wonder of all the earth,
 Mine heritage from sire to son,
 This mighty city, Babylon.

NITOCRIS.

Where happier than Sennacherib,
 By his own sons stabbed beneath the rib,
 Thou bearest yet the sword of power,
 A monarch to thy dying hour !
 A daughter's bosom, a daughter's arm,
 Thy living pillows, tender and warm.

NEBUCHIADNEZZAR.

Oh ! I am sick, and sigh for rest—
 Close not those curtains by the west—
 Once more that sight I have loved the best,
 The splendours of the waning light,
 In many-coloured changes bright,
 Full on my Eden of delight,
 Those hanging gardens my love and pride
 Reared for my Queen, my Median bride,
 When I tasted joy in my summer tide.
 The alabaster runnels lave
 Those terraced heights ; the rosebays wave

Their crimson blooms ; the luscious palm
Breathes heavy with the scent of balm,

And taller with each year that dies,
Do tamarisk and pomegranate rise,
Where I did plant my paradise

With every fair tree that yieldeth fruit—
Where the love song of birds is never mute.

Lo ! yonder in that myrtle grove,
Like a shepherd youth I wooed my love :

And there she lies embalmed in death—
Ah me ! the fig-tree languisheth,

The vine is dried up by swift decay,
Since joy from my soul is withered away.

Yes, she died young—and from that hour
I lived for majesty and power.

Look down on mighty Babylon ;
Behold the works that I have done,
And greater yet, but half begun !

Daughter Nitocris, what I would,
But cannot achieve, do thou make good.

NITOCRIS.

Ay, Father ; may I earn by this
More praise than famed Semiramis !

DANIEL.

I, Daniel, tell thee they must fall,
 Thy palace towers and the city wall,
 That mate with the storm-clouds, shall ruin all !

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Could we repent, like Nineveh,
 Would thy God put off the evil day
 My slaves and captives boast of ? When
 My race shall be cut off from men,
 My house be made the lions' den,
 Where bird unclean and ravening beast
 Shall shriek and growl o'er their loathsome feast.

BELSHAZZAR.

Tell thy Belshazzar, what hast thou done
 To earn this curse from sire to son ?

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

For a long life spent such meed I win,
 And thou, Belshazzar, dost ask of my sin ?
 Not by the grandchild of my blood
 My madness can be understood !
 Yet, if it must be—boy, stand near,
 That wisdom may reach Belshazzar's ear.

NITOCRIS.

Ay, let him take to heart thy curse,
 Lest God may yet afflict him worse.

NEBUCIADNEZZAR.

I was lord of captives and wealth untold,
When I made in my own heart's lust overbold,
An image of Bel in purest gold.

Full sixty cubits I reared his height
As the symbol of my will and might,
That through ages should stand in my dream's despite.

And glorious as the risen sun,
Afar that wondrous semblance shone
O'er the plain of Dura, by Babylon.

Like magic rising from the ground,
Did pipe and chord of music sound,
While my princes and captains were gathered around,
And at my word obedient, fell
In worship before the image of Bel :

Then man by man, every language and race
Bowed down at his feet an awestruck face ;
For I bade them choose 'twixt death by fire
And their spirits' homage to my desire.

But the chief of my Chaldees then drew near
With envenomed whisper in my ear :
“ Those Jews, who stand first in favour with thee,
O'er the province of Babylon set above me,
Those men, O King, have spurned thy decree.

“ They serve not thy gods, nor have worship paid
To the golden image which thou hast made.”

Then fury stung me : I felt a change
 Convulse my face, till its form grew strange,
 And my brain seethed, hot with a fiend's revenge.

DANIEL.

Seven times its wont, at thy desire,
 Was heated the burning furnace of fire,
 That its flame with pitch and naphtha fed
 Rose fifty cubits overhead ;
 And those three servants leal and true,
 Who bore their ban with the name of Jew,
 Bound, into the midst, thy strong men threw.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

But not thee, Daniel ! Who durst offend
 By envious slander against my friend ?
 Into fire they fell—I looked again,
 And lo ! by the flames my strong men slain !
 Once more I looked—not three, but four,
 Walked scathless on the smelting floor :
 'Twas an angel semblance beside them trod,
 For that fourth was like the Son of God.
 He smote with a moist and whistling wind
 The flames before them and behind ;
 Unscorched was their hair, unmoved their mind.
 And out of the fire I heard them sing
 Blessings and praise to heaven's high King.
 I stood, astonished, and changed my word,
 And worshipped that mighty God, their Lord,

For I knew no other God but this
Could so deliver those children of His.

DANIEL.

Hadst thou been wise in time, and known
The God of Israel for thy own,
The everlasting Holy One,
Not at thy hand would He now require
Those lives He ransomed from the fire.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, by men called great,
Was flourishing in my high estate,

At rest in my house—yet again, on my bed,
The thoughts and visions of my head
Haunted my dreams with troubles dread.

Again, O Daniel! to thee was given
The spirit of the God of heaven ;

Thy faithful tongue with pain and ruth,
Was bold to speak the awful truth.

How didst thou urge me, and implore
To judge uprightly, and sin no more,
But show compassion to the poor !

And break with the past—if it might be
God's mercy so should deal with me.

One year did give thy warning proof ;
When down I gazed from my palace roof
On the works I had made for my own behoof,

And said : “ Is not this great Babylon,
 Built by the captives my swerd has won,
 With the spoil of all nations beneath the sun ?

“ For the home of my Imperial race,
 By the might of my power, of my sovereign grace,
 I have made and adorned this glorious place.”

With the word in my mouth I heard from heaven
 A voice flash like the falling levin :

“ Nebuchadnezzar, to thee, O King,
 From God most High is spoke this thing :

“ From thee the kingdom shall depart,
 Till thou acknowledge in thy heart

“ ’Twas His to give as He hath willed.”
 Yea, that same hour was the curse fulfilled.

Horror and shuddering upon me came ;
 Of memory, speech, and human shame
 Bereft, my spirit was broken tame.

NITOCRIS.

But why didst thou fly to the desert wild
 From the shelter of home, from the care of thy child ?

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

The leper’s taint was on my mind,
 My own slaves drove me from my kind,
 And little right the faithful few
 To this poor wreck of power could do !

NITOCRIS.

Could'st thou not trust my love to cling
To thee till death, my father, my King?

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

From the house of my glory I dwelt aloof,
Where the oxen browse with trampling hoof :
Of the grass of the field like them I ate ;
With the dew of heaven my body was wet ;
Ay, seven years ! but what did I know
Of seasons or times in those days of woe ?
Naked I roamed, till my hair was grown
Like an eagle's plumage, and hard as stone,
My nails, like talons, ran to bone.

NITOCRIS.

O father ! from my heart is wrung
A drop of blood with each word from thy tongue.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Those days are ended—my hand and eye
Witness my trust in God most High ;
Taught by His light how poor a thing
This glory of an earthly king !
While I stand on the silent river's brim,
Stout of heart though faint of limb,
As the Lord of life I bow to Him !

NITOCRIS.

And I, too, father—if He forgive,
It may be my son shall reign and live !

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Lo, as a king 'mongst kings, I tread
 The mansions of the mighty dead,
 Each throned in glory on his bed.
 Can dust and darkness claim kindred thus ?
 "Art thou become as one of us ?"
 Spare me such sepulchre of pride,
 But lay me in the earth, beside
 Her, my soul's joy, my youth's fair bride.
 My monument for ever stands,
 Like a mountain chain from the desert sands
 Raised by sheer strength of human hands :
 Those triple walls, those gates of brass,
 While the ages of men shall blossom and pass,
 Remain to witness what Lord I was ;
 Fire and flood shall sweep them o'er,
 Man shall dwell there nevermore !
 They shall be heaps—yet wondering fame
 Shall dig their depths and find my name !

NITOCRIS.

Shall I see this ?—Alas, for these
 Our pleasant homes, our palaces !

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

No more, but as a yeanling lamb
 Scorched by the sand-storm's blast I am :
 Pass, light and glory, hovering yet
 Upon the verge of darkness—let
 The curtains fall—the sun is set !

SONNETS.

HOMER.

STRONG son of earth's hot youth, divinely born
To song, when grace and harmony were first
In early Greece, yet by thy mother nursed
With human tears, beneath reproach and scorn.
Blind seer ! the light within thy heart cried out
'Gainst destiny, to creation's travail throes
Gave voice—to men, the slaves of fear and doubt,
The richest music breathed by mortal woes.
Homer, thou quenchless spirit of Hellas ! Time
Nor change can cast away thy living word,
Poured, like the golden honey of her clime,
Down through the ages, and for ever heard
In murmured sympathy with sea and sky,
The glory of the land that saw thee live and die !

SAPPHO.

GREAT priestess of the mysteries of fate,
Undaunted Sappho ! eloquent to sing
 Of love's deep heart, the budding pang of spring,
Sick joy's cold thrill of anguish passionate !
'Mongst Hellas' daughters, thou, self-immolate,
 Alone shalt speak for ever, while the sting
Of man's deceit from quivering lips can wring
 The cry of woman to her perjured mate.
Thou wast not earthly born ; a living fire
 Of the keen lightning's essence was thy sire ;
Thy soul was uttered forth in one long kiss
 Once and for all : then, wrecked by broken faith,
The sunken rock beneath thy tide of bliss,
 Flashed back immortal through the sea of death !

ÆSCHYLUS.

HERO and poet, Athens' giant son !
Upon her side 'gainst Persian hordes, how strong
Thy battle arm ! how grand and rich thy song
Hymning her glorious days of Marathon
And Salamis ! Seer of the unknown God,
By vision dark thou didst behold as in
A glass the mystery of woe and sin,
The awful law of blood that will have blood.
Lo, o'er the mirror of thy soul athirst
For justice, flashed the eyes unquenchable
Of slaughtered forms, uprisen through death and
hell ;
Such prophet wert thou, Æschylus, the first
To build the tragic stage, through eye and ear
Smiting upon men's hearts the image of their fear.

SOPHOCLES.

THRICE happy bard, with mind, with speech, with form
Supreme in strength and beauty, on thy tongue
Dropped honey ; in thy fingers, soft and warm,
Language was set as wax, to earn so young
Thy crown as tragic singer, and thy name,
“The Bee,” in Athens : long thy glorious years
Rang with applause, and burned with passion’s tears
Passing the promise of thy early fame.
Oak of the land, thy ninetieth summer’s fruit
Bloomed fairest, sweetest, in the virgin bride,
Daughter and sister, her who grandly died,
Antigone : and when the chords were mute
Beneath thy hand, adoring Hellas bore
Their echoes in her heart, divine for evermore.

EURIPIDES.

BORN to man's troubles, of a sorrowing woman,
 In that dark hour when victory was wrung
From fate, at Salamis, how true and human
 Upon thy lip the tragic music sprung,
Euripides ! and through the crash of war
The pulse of passion winged thy words afar
 Who spake not as a god, but wept in common
With flesh and blood, and showed them as they are.
Sweet voice of wisdom ! when the captive thrall
 Of Grecian birth could mingle with his groans
Some fragments of thy speech, the chains would fall
 From off his bruised limbs, the scattered stones
Of mercy's altar rise again beneath
Thy song that charmed to peace their tyrants' doom of
 death.

SHAKESPEARE.

A voice of nature thrilling everywhere
Through pulse and nerve of living heart and head—
Crowned with a garland ever fresh and fair,
Sovereign among the unforgotten dead,
Shakespeare is with us, next the Word of truth,
The vein of wisdom's jewels most desired ;
Who, three dark centuries past, a God-sent youth,
Looked out on life with prophet eye inspired—
The touch of fire was on his lips, to teach
Heaven's harmonies on earth, whose music, rolled
Through rugged numbers of our Saxon speech,
Rang sweetly as the angels' harps of gold,
Till kindred choirs that lent, took back their own
To sing before the everlasting throne.

BYRON.

Son of the morning ! fallen to earth from heaven,
With lips of music, eyes of flame and breath
Of passion, as from 'mong the shining Seven
One angel banished to this valley of death :
Wast thou not heard what time the new-born stars
Sang out for joy of young creation's day ?
Ere thou hadst known the taste of sin that mars
God's image, blurred within the house of clay.
Byron ! thou wast not of the chill gray North
Where thou wast born : unto reviving Greece
Thy soul, athirst for beauty's joy, went forth,
To pass through pain and turmoil into peace :
Poet ! above thy forehead's early snows
Spring fadeless glory and love—the laurel and the rose.

LAMARTINE.

THOU unforgotten, dost remember me
Afar with God ? The girl with woman's tears
Deep welling o'er thy sorrow-laden years—
Knit by a daughter's kindness unto thee
Childless, and I an orphan ? Second birth
To heavenly light, to song divine, to love
Ineffable, whose gift is from above,
I owe thee, dearer than the ties of earth.
Still in the pathway of thy evening
A radiance pales the glories of the morn :
From my life's book the first fresh leaflets torn
In hope's dim borderland lie quivering ;
There from thy soul a voice doth stir my own,
So well I know that deep and tender tone !

JOB XVII. 14.

BELOVED dust, from whom my being sprung,
Fond lips, that felt thy little child's caress,
Untimely sealed—though faithful memory clung
To looks and words recalled from nothingness :
Father ! I was thy only one, thy pride :
Dying, thou bad'st thy baby girl be true
And fearless, in the deep and adverse tide
That rose against me as I lived and grew.
Why was I left, and thou, so great of heart,
Cut off before the prize of life was won,
Thy heir an infant, and thy glorious part
'Mongst the world's best and highest scarce begun ?
So, death claimed kindred with me, and his power
Taught me to taste of wrong, the orphan's bitter dower.

M. L. A. B.

BRIGHT noon of beauty quenched in widowhood,
True loving broken heart that lived for me—
My earthly wealth of all things pure and good,
My treasure garnered in the home to be—
Ah, sweet my mother ! were those same fond eyes
Set 'mongst the stars about the sapphire throne,
While mine searched, tearless, through the iron skies
In God's creation utterly alone ?
I loved thee well, and yet how little worth
The joy that paid thee for a mother's pain,
The passionate, yearning hope to live again !—
Till that dark even of my day of birth,
The angel gathered thee like golden corn,
And left my maimèd life as flesh from spirit torn.

TILL DEATH US DO PART.

(*July 3rd, 1882.*)

FIVE years gone by since thou didst call me wife !

It seems a little month of cloudless days
Since with thy love joy came into my life,

A radiant stranger ; and the fond heart prays
We may be thus together all our years,
Or few or many, for I ask to live
Thy time—no longer, as I know no fears,
No hope, without thee that this world can give.
Oh ! my soul's blessing, God's best gift—mine own—
Let Him take back my treasure with thy breath.
When it seems best to Him, but not alone—
I would not part from thee in life nor death,
Till, in our Father's house, these eyes shall see
The marriage feast unto eternity.

SEVEN YEARS.

(*July 3rd, 1884.*)

SEVEN years this day together—ay, seven years
Our mortal bliss has lasted, and the love
Of our espousals blooms untainted of
This world's foul breath, affection's mingling tears
The gentle dew that feeds its heavenly growth.
So may we live, so may God keep us both
To see our silver wedding, and thy sun
Brighten at eve, and then—my life is done.
Our golden union in a holier band
Shall draw my spirit towards the promised land :
For never more to any earthly thing,
Save only thee, whose love has filled the loss
That crushed my youth beneath the bitter cross,
The tendrils of my heart's desire may cling.

LOVE IS OF GOD.

(1886.)

NINE golden years since, in the depth of grief,
Love whispered me of hope and happy rest
In earth's first, dearest tie, for ever blest
From young creation's morn : O Time ! thou thief
Of nature, now give pause, forget us here—
My sun has touched his zenith ; this the hour,
Life, hated once, is rich in joy and power,
And light is sweet—yet wherefore should I fear ?
Love dies not, passing through the starry sea
From depth to depth of suns, where never clomb
The thought of living man, unto that home
Where neither mortal change nor pain can be :
Though bonds of earth to that eternal shore
Reach not, love is of God, for evermore.

IN MEMORIAM.

(*F. L. G., February, 1885.*)

ART thou no longer but a fond regret,
O friend and brother, ever kind and true ?
Close by the altar steps I see thee yet,
As when I first such tie of kindred knew,
The gift of wedded love : no son of earth
Through chastening fire a heart more guileless bore,
More precious to the few who proved thy worth,
Rough in the grain, but honest to the core.
And now thou sleepest with thy fathers—gone
To peace—and though in flesh and blood, our eyes
Shall see thy face no more, we hope—for One
Hath spoke the word : “Thy brother shall arise :”
And to His hands, with trust that conquers dread,
We yield in silence our beloved dead.

ALICE MARY CUNNINGHAM.

(*Descendant of Allan Cunningham. Born at Sea.*)

WEE black-eyed fairy, blossom of the sea,
What strange conjunction of portentous stars
Looked down on thy beginning? Joy to thee,
Born on the waves like foam-sprung Venus! Mars
Is bound to use thee kindly, little lass,
Whose father serves the Empress Queen, and has
No less a gossip than the god of wars;
While Neptune sends thy nurses, British tars.
Grow fair and wise, until the breeze of fame
Shall whisper thee, thou bear'st a poet's name;
Fair weather smile upon thee from the blue
Of deepest heaven, and with unfading light
Instruct thy maiden sail to trim aright
Her snowy wings, and keep thee pure and true!

FLORENCE PENNINGTON.

(Drowned in the River Dovey, Merionethshire, August 24th, 1886.)

MAIDEN of England's true and fearless blood,
Swift to redeem, at cost of thy fair life,
A brother, striving with the hungry flood
To wrest from fate his spent and sinking wife.
Another by the brink had idly stood
With wringing hands and feeble echoing cry,
But thou wert brave to dare what woman could
And, like a soldier's sister, nobly die :
Sudden and strong the treacherous current bore
Thy lissom limbs down to a timeless rest,
And cast the husband senseless on the shore,
His babes' dead mother locked upon his breast.
Yet 'twas enough—thy sweet breath given for him
Shall burn in memory's lamp no years can quench or dim.

IN MEMORIAM.

(*Arthur O'Shaugnessy. January 30th, 1881.*)

HOME to thy wife and babes ! Are ye all gone
Unto the land where sounds of human praise
Perish forgotten ? Ah, how few the days
Since ye were earthly happy ! two made one
By love, that bids our mortal dust put on
 Immortal longings ; now for you there stays
The marriage feast with those whose rest is won.
Poet ! thy spirit dwelt beyond the sun
In song, and thou hast lived thy life, with aim
 More noble than the world's reward could give :
For I have heard thee say, "I would not strive
For fleeting honours, but the enduring name
 To come hereafter"—dead, thy voice shall live
Among the deathless minstrel heirs of fame.

SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE.

SEALED with the kiss of God, he takes his rest,
The ancient of a hundred years gone by
Like shades and sunbeams o'er the evening's breast,
Yet crowned with honour to eternity :
For thou hast lived thy life, O son of time !
Walking with God, and even to the end
In thee have age and weakness shown sublime,
Whom want and woe used ever as their friend.
O Hebrew father ! in this Christian land
Be unforgotten ! He whose name is Love
Receive thee that fulfilled His first command,
And join again with her whose spirit strove
In thee 'gainst death's dark barrier—satisfied
With days, go home in joy a bridegroom to thy bride.

TO MRS. KENDAL.

(As *Claire in the "Ironmaster."*)

THE wounded spirit that can break, not bend,
When love betrayed counts not the bitter cost
Of scorn's requital, and the iron frost
Turned withering alike on foe and friend—
That pass—the hardest in the fate of woman,
To shrink in madness from a husband's side,
And vows too rashly spoke in stubborn pride—
These canst thou bid us feel with thee in common.
Not with the cunning of consummate art,
But with the life and pulse of thy whole heart,
Dost thou so move us to the very core
Of soul and body, with thy long, low wail,
True misery's cry—till truth and hope prevail,
And love's rich blessing crowns thee evermore.

HENRY THE FIFTH OF FRANCE.

(*September, 1883.*)

In peace with God, a blessing on his lips,
Henry of France has won the crown of life ;
Ruling his spirit, while he slowly sips
The bitterness of death, through Nature's strife
The blameless Prince comes greater now than they
Who wade through blood to thrones. By time
and chance
Unchanged, he swerved not from the better way :
For himself, nothing ; hoping all for France.
Heaven looked on him, and chose him for its own :
And though he never felt the hidden sting
Bound in the circlet of a mortal crown,
All men shall say of him, " This was a King ; "
And buried with the noblest of his line,
Lies the white lily flag of Right Divine.

PRINCESS BEATRICE.

DAUGHTER of England ! in the golden hour
When wedded love its heavenly flame has shed
With praises of thy people, and a shower
 Of marriage blessings on thy gracious head ;
Why do they breathe for thee the self-same prayer,
 In Israel's language and thy mother tongue,
The patriarch of a hundred years, the young
Bright children ? God be with the loving pair !
Why, but for thou hast poured thy pure heart's
 treasure
Back to its well-spring, and thy morning bloom
Laid, a fair garland, on thy father's tomb,
To comfort her whose sorrow knows no measure.
Love is of God, and He has crowned your life
With love's immortal joy, husband and wife.

QUEEN ADELAIDE'S TREE IN WINDSOR FOREST.

MIDST Windsor Chase, where Norman William made
His hunting realm, the home of his delight ;
Where many a time the Druids' secret glade
Was lit by fires of sacrifice at night—
Deep in old fairy-land, whose mystic shade
Strives with the all-seeing sun, half dim, half bright ;
This tree was set by good Queen Adelaide,
A landmark of fair England's fairest sight.
Lo, in the vista through the forest lies
Proud Windsor, and the high-embattled tower,
Where Scotland's king was found by beauty's eyes,
And taught to sing away the prison hour.
Ah, ancient stones, what love, what joy, what tears
Have writ the story of Victoria's years !

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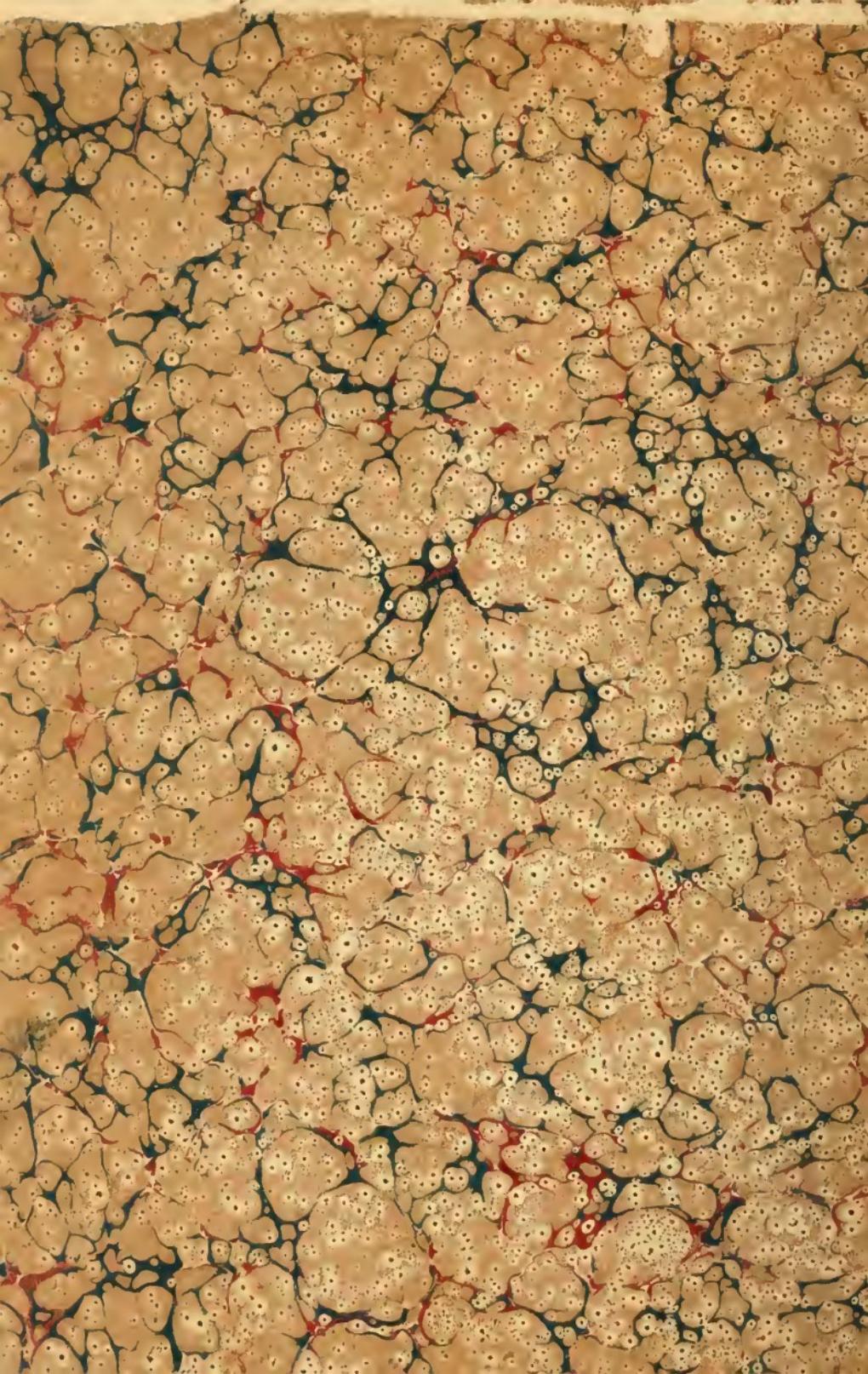
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